

# **Guide to Consulting the 'India, Punjab, Moga Land Ownership Pedigrees, 1887-1958' record-collection on FamilySearch.com for the Purposes of Punjabi and Sikh Genealogical Research**

## Introduction

I came across an amazing, free, and online resource for Sikh/Punjabi genealogy. I was able to trace my ancestors back to the time period of Guru Gobind Singh! You can trace your ancestors back, too. I will teach you how to do it. Read this article fully for a detailed guide if you are interested doing this.

## Guide

I stumbled-upon a valuable resource that I believe few know about. So the basic backstory is that a Sikh convert to Mormonism, named Gurcharan Singh Gill, has spent his entire retirement digitizing the land-records of Moga district and parts of Firozpur district after he discovered that the records contain genealogical pedigrees (family-trees) that trace back each landowner's ancestry for that area. Mormons are very interested in genealogy for doctrinal beliefs, so the Mormon Church has been digitizing these records and putting them online for the public thanks to Mr. Gill.

Anyways, the land-records (including the detailed genealogies) for the landowning families of Moga district (+ parts of Firozpur dist.) are available online for free viewing over on FamilySearch.com. Initially when I learnt about this resource, I was skeptical but lo-and-behold, I was actually able to find my Sikh ancestors and was able to learn the names of my ancestors going back to the period of Guru Gobind Singh (approximate guess based on the number of generations and typical generational gaps of 20-40 years)! Before, I only knew up until my great-great-great-great-grandfather (oral-history from my grandmother), but now after discovering these records, I can trace back to my earliest recorded ancestor in the records: my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather (that is eight greats!). I was able to trace so far in back in time that I reached ancestors that did not even have "Singh" in their name (from what my family remembers, we have always been Sikhs since forever and do not know when we converted, so this was a big discovery). I felt like it was a Vaisakhi gift from Waheguru Ji to my family. I think it would be a shame if only a few people know about this resource, so I thought I would write-up a detailed tutorial for other Sikhs/Punjabis interested in their family's genealogy.

So basically, these type of records are called "Shajra Nasab" or "Kursinama" and they were created to track ownership of land in a given area. Therefore, only patrilineal ancestors

were recorded since these records were created for practical reasons and women/girls could not inherit land back then. Thus, usually only fathers and sons are recorded (some exceptions I will get into later).

Here is how you can trace your lineage back as well, step-by-step (beginning with disqualifying criteria):

1. Your ancestral village/town/city MUST have been located in present-day Moga district (some parts of Firozpur district are also recorded) of Punjab State in the Republic of India. If your ancestral location is outside of Moga or Firozpur districts, then your records are not part of this digitized collection. However, it is not hopeless. You can still probably travel to your ancestral location and request the land-records in-person from the responsible administrative department (hopefully they are still extant and have not been lost/destroyed/"manipulated"). It will be great if more Indian subcontinental districts' land-records will be digitized and made available for free online like Moga district's.
2. Your family MUST have been landowners. These records only recorded the details of landowning families, completely ignoring landless families. Some castes (such as Jatts) were more likely to own land, while lower-castes were sadly disbarred from owning land easily during the colonial-period due to prejudicial laws.
3. You MUST know some basic information about your ancestors already. I recommend you know at-least four generations back to your great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather (however, how many generations back you should know already depends on how old you are, the older you are, the less generations back you have to know and vice-versa for younger people). If you are relying solely on the "older" records from the 1880s, then you will probably have to trace back even further... so I hope your village has the "newer" records from the 1950s. If you only know about recent ancestors, then it will be useless as they are probably not recorded in these records. Ask your relatives (especially older ones) for all the details of your ancestors, you will be surprised by how much they know. I recommend you do this before your older relatives who know the details pass-away! I highly recommend you also learn as much details as possible about your individual ancestors, such as: their caste (quom), clan (got), siblings (this will come in-handy, will explain later), nicknames, etc.
4. If you satisfy all of the above criteria, you have a good chance of finding your family's record. Go to [FamilySearch.com](http://FamilySearch.com) and create a free-account (you cannot view the records without making an account but it is quick, free, and easy). After making an account, go to the following record collection: "India, Punjab, Moga Land Ownership Pedigrees, 1887-1958"
5. Once you enter the collection, you can choose between either Firozpur or Moga districts. Firozpur district's records are not as complete as Moga district's (less villages are listed). After picking the district, find your village's volume of records. There may be multiple volumes of

records for the same village. Sadly, not all villages' records have been preserved/digitized. Some records are labelled as "Unknown Village", so if your village cannot be found, try looking in there.

6. The records generally come from two time-periods: the 1880s (contain the most information about the earliest ancestors, they were written in Urdu in Nastaliq script) or the 1950s (contain the lineage only going back around four generations or so, usually were written in Punjabi in Gurmukhi script, however some are still in Urdu). If you are lucky, your village will have both the "old" (1880s) and "new" (1950s) records preserved, which will come in-hand.

7. Once you have found the relevant volume of records, simply go through each one page-by-page and cross-reference your known knowledge of your ancestors to what is written. The records are divided by land-plot numbers, if you know that information then this might be easier for you. I didn't know my ancestors' plot-numbers but I was still able to find them so do not worry. The top of the page of the record will usually record the caste and clan of the family on that page.

8. Once you have found your family, then congratulations! However, I hope you know Urdu (in Nastaliq) or Punjabi (in Gurmukhi) or else you have another step: Get someone to translate them for you. I was able to do this by asking Pakistanis online to help me translate my family's Urdu record. They were kind enough to-do so (albeit the images can be blurry which can cause trouble).

Tips for finding the correct genealogy of your ancestors in the record:

1. Know your caste (biradari/zaat/quom) and clan (got). Families from all major religions (Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim) are recorded in these records.

2. If you see multiple people with the same name of your ancestor in the record, you can eliminate them one-by-one until you find the correct one by checking which one has the same brother that your ancestor had. This helped me eliminate four possible matches for one of my ancestors until I found the correct one.

3. At-least some of the "newer" records actually record wives and daughters in some cases. I am not sure why but this might be helpful if you know the wife/daughter of your ancestor. The "newer" records also generally have a legend on the first-page which explains the meaning of symbols the compiler used.

4. If your ancestral location has both a newer and older record, you can try finding the newer record first and then after learning new information from the newer record, you can then try to find the older record. This would be useful if the earliest known ancestor of yours was alive when the newer record was created and was recorded but was not recorded on the older

record, you can then bridge them and find your older record (hope this makes sense, hard to explain).

Bonus tip: If you want to figure out when your ancestor in the record approximately lived, go to the latest ancestor whose birth year is known and subtract 20 from it and 40 to create a 20-year-range. For example, if my latest ancestor with a known birth-year was born in 1900, then their father likely was born from circa 1860–1880, and their father was likely born from circa 1840–1860, and then 1820–1840... you can keep going for each generation. This is because people usually have their children after they turn twenty-years-old and before they turn forty-years-old. However, it is just an estimate and of course it could be inaccurate if your ancestor had a child really early or late in their life.

Final tip: After all of this, you can probably trace even further back if you consult pundits at popular pilgrimage places where genealogical-records are maintained, such as Haridwar in Uttarakhand. But that is the subject of another post... (I still have to do that myself)

### Conclusion

Good-luck, everyone! I hope you are able to find your Sikh/Punjabi ancestors. You might be surprised by some of the names of your earliest ancestors and how "tribal" they seem. Many of these old Punjabi names have long-since gone extinct and been forgotten. These records also contain information about the location/amount of land your ancestors held, if you find it interesting. Traditional Indic units of land measurements were used for that. If you find your record, I recommend you print it out and write the names of recent ancestors until you get to yourself on the printed genealogy to continue it until the present-day. Then you can store it somewhere or frame it and hang it on a wall inside your house or something.

### Date and Acknowledgements

Date of writing: April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025

A special thank you to Gurcharan Singh Gill and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for compiling this resource and making it available to the general-public via FamilySearch.com.

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#### Additional Resources for Punjabi/Sikh Genealogy

1. Punjab Land Records, Department of Revenue, Rehabilitation and Disaster Management, Government of Punjab, India, available at: <https://jamabandi.punjab.gov.in>
2. Genealogical registers at places of religious pilgrimage, such as Haridwar in Uttarakhand, Allahabad, Varanasi, etc. A small amount of these records have been digitized and made available online via FamilySearch.com, record-collection titled 'India, Hindu Pilgrimage Records, 1194-2015', refer to: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/1867930>